

RESOURCES

News about nature, history and horticulture in Fairfax County

Volume 3, No. 2 Winter 2003

BALD EAGLES—A *Winter Discovery*

By John Bendoritis, Seasonal Employee at Lake Accotink Park



Spotting a bald eagle is one of the big winter thrills for birders. Such sightings are a major part of documenting what appears to be the recovery of the bald eagle population. During last year's December Christmas bird count, an event held throughout the nation, 115 bald eagles were spotted in one day around Ft. Belvoir.

Statewide, a record number of 446 eaglets were tallied, the offspring of 331 breeding pairs in Virginia. This number dramatizes a rebound initially triggered by the 1972 national ban on the use of DDT, a chemical that led to a precipitous drop in successful live eaglet births.

The adult bald eagle is regal and familiar as our national symbol: a white feathered head and tail; fierce, hooked yellow beak; and proud piercing eyes almost as large as a human eye. An adult eagle stands nearly three feet tall and its black talons are set on feet about six inches long, large even for a raptor.

If you spot an adult bald eagle in the air from directly below, you should see the white of head and tail against the dark brown plumage of body and a wingspan extending to over six feet. Bald eagles do not develop their distinctive white head and tail plumage until about their fourth year. By then, their bills, legs and feet have turned a deep yellow.

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Dranesville Tavern—*History and Hospitality*

It was a business entrepreneur's dream, even in 1818. Buy land where major roads meet and build yourself a place for people to break their journeys. Feed them, give them a place to sleep, assure the safety of their belongings. Send them off the next morning, happy after a big breakfast.

Howard Johnson would have been proud of Washington Drane, a businessman who opened a "new tavern on Leesburgh Road." Drane's "house of entertainment" sat near the junction of the Georgetown Turnpike and the Leesburg Pike, today also known as Route 7. His purpose in selecting that particular rural site, he noted, was to create a "new building on the road leading from Georgetown to Leesburgh: 15 miles from the former and 15 miles from the latter place," breaking the two-day trip.

Soon the area around the tavern became known as Dranesville, a community that by 1840 contained

a church, a post office, a store, doctors' offices, residences—and five taverns. Dranesville was perfectly sited to serve those bringing goods and animals from the rich farms of the Shenandoah Valley to the competing coastal markets of Alexandria and Georgetown. There are stories of how Kentucky farmers drove their turkeys first through tar and then through sand to coat their feet for the long trip to market.

One of the five taverns, Dranesville Tavern, was built in 1823 and still remains at its site on Leesburg Pike. The log building with massive Seneca sandstone chimneys had two additions over the years. It served as a place of food and lodging on the Leesburg Pike for at least 130 years. In 1865, after a renovation of the inn by owners Mr. and Mrs. George Jackson, the *Alexandria Gazette* newspaper described the tavern

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Winter Wonders

ResOURces Online a Winner!

We are proud to announce that our electronic complement, *ResOURces Online*, has received the highest award for a Promotional Effort in Electronic Media this year from the Virginia Recreation and Parks Association. We were in competition with the largest jurisdictions in the state and are honored that, after only a year, the web site has reached this status. As a supplement to the award-winning print publication, the stories online bring more and different information about area history and nature, especially in our parks. Check us out at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.



Farm Animal Babies

Sheep, pigs, goats and cows deliver babies during late winter and early spring. January through April is the busiest time, although two lambs have already been born at Frying Pan Farm Park this fall. So stop by often to catch the new arrivals or call Frying Pan for birth updates at 703-437-9101.

*Look for more
winter events
inside on pages
6, 7 and 12!*



Pohick Stream Valley Hike

Kids aged eight and older can explore one of Fairfax County's best-kept natural secrets, the Pohick Stream Valley forest, on Sunday, December 29. The hike, from 1 to 3 pm, is at Hidden Pond Nature Center. Winter is a great time to look for dens and animal trails, for signs of white-tailed deer, gray fox and other critters. The hike will traverse a variety of terrains, so good walking shoes are a must. Dress for the weather. Reservations are required and the cost is \$3. Call 703-451-9588. Canceled in case of extreme weather conditions.

Café Cattail

Welcome to Huntley Meadows' very own family oriented coffeehouse! On Friday, January 31, from 9:30 pm, enjoy a free, relaxing evening applauding our community's talents. Musicians, dancers and poets are encouraged to share their arts with a nature theme. Sponsored by Friends of Huntley Meadows Park. Reservations are required for performers only.



Outstanding Interpreter

John Callow, Senior Interpreter at Riverbend Park, was presented the Park Authority's annual Interpretive Excellence Award this year for his outstanding work in initiating and managing the park's successful new kayak program series. These programs reach a new audience for the park and give participants a first-hand experience with the Potomac River that heightens their appreciation of this valuable natural resource. John's personal manner inspires confidence and award judges highlighted his engaging interpretation of the river and all it involves.



Banjos, Bones and Tales

On Sunday, February 23, Sully Historic Site presents **Banjos, Bones and Tales**, a special program of traditional African American music and storytelling.

At 1 pm, local musician and teacher Cass Harris will perform traditional Appalachian and African American banjo music. Discover the fascinating history of the African banjo and see a unique display of his antique banjo collection. The cost is \$5 per seat.

At 2 pm, listen as the costumed interpreter weaves a tapestry of African American stories that bring the past to life. Storytelling is FREE.

At 3 pm, hear Ralph Lee Smith in concert! Appalachian dulcimer music, local lore and oral traditions spin a tantalizing web of the past. See antique dulcimers, listen to traditional Appalachian music and feel the rhythm created by playing the bones. The cost is \$5 per seat.

Seating is limited. Prepaid reservations are required by February 21. Refunds require two-weeks' written notice. Refreshments will be served in the original 18th century kitchen. There is a separate cost for an optional guided house tour.



The Fairfax County Park Authority is committed to equal access in all programs and services. Special accommodations will be provided upon request. Please call the ADA/Access Coordinator at 703-324-8563, at least 10 working days in advance of the date services are needed. TTY (703) 803-3354 <http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/ada.htm>

RESOURCES

Editor: Jane Scully

Photos: Don Sweeney,
Jane Scully

Illustrations: Nancy Hornstein

Circulation: Karen Temple

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To receive your free copy of **RESOURCES**, fill out the form on the back cover or register directly on our web site at www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/resources.htm.

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Special Holiday Shopping FOR CHILDREN—AND ADULTS!

Holiday magic brings sparkle and excitement to children and parents during December in the parks. Special shopping days for children take place at Colvin Run Mill Historic Site and Frying Pan Park where the old-fashioned stores of other eras are stocked with gifts unique to each park.

Children's Holiday Shopping days this year will offer a wagon-full of different and exciting



items specially priced for children to select and buy in secret for their families and friends. No parents allowed to peek!

Inside the stores volunteers will help children make selections. Then other volunteers will wrap the carefully chosen items to keep the surprise element intact when the children happily rush out to meet their waiting parents.

Adults will find shopping at the stores a pleasant change of pace as well. Many of the gifts in the stores have been chosen as perfect presents for the children. At the General Store at Colvin Run Mill in Great Falls, for instance, there are old-fashioned toys that make great stocking stuffers, including games of chess, dominoes and checkers in a tin box and tea sets perfect for young ladies.

At Frying Pan Country Store in Herndon, there are all sizes of the popular Ertl tractors along with wooden and floor puzzles. There is a new line of Breyer horses, along with their farm sets and stables. A menagerie of stuffed noisy farm animals play throughout the store.

In the book nook books on horses for young adults and children are in full supply.

Other park sites have fascinating shops as well. Following the history theme, Sully Historic Site in Chantilly has a great selection of history books, historical music CDs and tri-corner hats, wooden whistles and toys. Their boxed bayberry candles are real beauties, with candlesticks aplenty to accompany them. For when you're hungry, there is the Junior League cookbook and lots of jams, jellies and Virginia peanuts.

What if you—and your child—love the outdoors? At our nature centers, such as Hidden Pond in Springfield, Hidden Oaks in Annandale and Ellanor C. Lawrence Park in Chantilly, you'll find Peterson bird field guides along with Golden Guides and First Guides to get you started. There are wildflower books next to stuffed owls, frogs and turtles.

A favorite is the wide selection of finger puppets, including snakes, insects, spiders, butterflies and dragonflies.

So bring your kids for the special Children's Shopping Days (it's a secret what they can buy for YOU—maybe some corn meal ground on site from Colvin Run Mill?) and then come back to shop for them. The shops are a unique place in December, and you'll leave feeling positively jolly! 🎄

Children's Holiday Shopping Days at Colvin Run Mill are Saturday morning, December 7, from 9 am to 1 pm; Sunday afternoon, December 8, from noon to 4 pm; and Monday afternoon, December 9, from 1 pm to 4 pm. Parents can visit the model train display in the barn!

At Frying Pan General Store, the dates are Saturday, December 7, from 12:30 to 3:30 pm, and Monday, December 9, from 2 to 5 pm. Sign in at the Old Schoolhouse where parents may wait for their shoppers.





Hooray for Volunteers!

At the recent Resource Management Division Volunteer Excellence Award reception, eight people were honored for giving over 20 years of

volunteer service to protecting the county's natural and cultural resources. Pictured here are: Rose Quinn, a docent at Sully Historic Site, Gwen McIntyre, a volunteer-on-duty at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park and Michael Toms, a docent at Colvin Run Mill. They are proudly sporting their new shirts embroidered with the division's "20+ Years" volunteer logo.

Also honored were Jackie Culyer and Joyce Pearsall, volunteers with the County Archaeology program, Jack Moore and Karen Goodlatte, who volunteer at Huntley Meadows Park, and Nick Yannarell, who volunteers at both Ellanor C. Lawrence Park and Colvin Run Mill Historic Site.

Their dedication and commitment are remarkable, and we are truly grateful for all their continued efforts as stewards of our natural and cultural resources.

Think you might be ready to follow in their footsteps? Volunteer opportunities abound at the parks. For more information about volunteer opportunities, contact Erin Chernisky at 703-324-8750 or erin.chernisky@fairfaxcounty.gov. 🌿

AL STUDHOLME (1913-2002)



Al Studholme was a gifted storyteller. He ably told the story behind the changing landscape of Fairfax County. He honed these abilities through a lifetime of curiosity, studies with the pre-eminent ecologist Aldo Leopold and a professional career with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

As a volunteer with the Fairfax County Park Authority for more than 20 years, Al shared his "reading" the landscape skills with staff and the public. If you were fortunate enough to walk along side Al at Mason District or Riverbend parks, he would help you look carefully and uncover clues to the present condition of the land, such as farming practices and old home sites.

Al Studholme was a beloved mentor and friend to many at the Park Authority. He was a gentle, quiet man who generously shared his knowledge and love of the land. His passion for wildflowers was contagious! Hiking with him through wildflower-carpeted stream valleys in spring was a delight. Behind each flower was a story to be revealed and habitat requirements to be explained. As a skilled photographer, he captured the essence of spring wildflowers on film, allowing staff to share the stories of these delicate resources year round.

Al Studholme's voice may be gone but it has not been silenced. For Al inspired and mentored many at the Park Authority who now share the stories of the land. 🌿

GARDENING RESOURCES

The Internet offers a plethora of reference material. Here are a few web sites to get you started:

- The Virginia Cooperative Extension web site has extensive information for the home gardener, including annuals; perennials; bulbs; trees and shrubs; insects and pesticides; lawns; monthly gardening tips and more. Go to www.ext.vt.edu/resources/, and click on "Home Gardening."
- Green Spring Gardens Park's web site offers information sheets you can download on many topics such as deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, perennials, natives vines, groundcovers, garden installation and maintenance. Go to <http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/gsgp/index.htm>, and click on "Gardening."
- Also check out the numerous classes offered at Green Spring that are listed on the web site and in *Parktakes*, the Park Authority publication.
- The Virginia Native Plant Society lists native plants and their uses. Go to <http://www.vnps.org/>, then click on "Native Plant References."
- The Maryland Native Plant Society at www.mdflora.org.
- The University of Maryland web site, especially for Integrated Pest Management at www.hgic.umd.edu and www.pest.umd.edu.
- An excellent site from the University of Georgia for xeriscaping—a guide to developing a water-wise landscape. Includes planning and design tips, maintenance and plant selection lists: <http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B1073.htm#Tables>.

WHERE TO SHOP

Once I've got some ideas of what I want to try, I delve into my stack of mail order catalogs to see what is available. Pinetree Garden Seeds, Jung Quality Seeds and Johnny's Selected Seeds are good sources for seeds. For bulbs I like John Scheepers and Brent and Becky's Bulbs.

There are many local nurseries as well, including Windy Hill Plant Farm in Aldie, Virginia, Merrifield Gardens in Merrifield and Fair Oaks, VA and American Plant Food and Behnke's Nursery in Maryland. The Spring and Fall Plant Sales at Green Spring are always a great resource for native plants.

Favorite mail order sources include:

- Fairweather Gardens: www.fairweathergardens.com, 856-451-6261 in New Jersey.
- Singing Springs Nursery: www.singingspringsnursery.com, 919-732-9403 in North Carolina.
- Plant Delights: www.plantdelights.com, 919-772-4794 in North Carolina.
- Heronswood: www.héronswood.com, 360-297-4172 in Washington state.
- Woodlanders: www.woodlanders.net, 803-648-7522 in South Carolina.
- Stokes: www.stokestropicals.com.

Winter Planning Sows Spring Rewards

By Sarah Brachman, Green Spring Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener

Even though I miss the warm weather and getting my hands into the soil, winter is a very productive time for my gardening efforts. I finally have the time to reflect on what I liked and didn't like about my garden, what plants didn't work out together and what landscaping projects I want to attempt. I look at photos I've taken during the growing season.

Then I refer to some of my favorite gardening books for new ideas. Anna Pavord's *The Border Book* provides inspiration for planning new garden beds. C. Colsten Burrell's *Perennial Combinations* shows a variety of plant combinations with color, form and texture in mind. Tracy DiSabato-Aust's *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* is a book I refer to again and again for solid advice on how to manage a perennial garden.

Plant Selection: Shrubs



I like to start planning with shrubs—the backbone of my garden. Some wonderful small to mid-size shrubs to consider include winterberry or deciduous holly (*Ilex verticillata*), which is stunning when massed in early January before the birds devour the red fruit. But even without the fruit, the leaves of this shrub rival a hedge of burning bush

(*Euonymus alatus*), which is now on the list of invasives.

Dwarf nandina (*Nandina domestica* "Firepower")—see above—is a small evergreen shrub that turns bright red in the fall, and then new growth reverts to its chartreuse green color in spring. For a larger plant, choose the straight species, which is taller and known for its brilliant red fruit in the fall and winter. Red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) is a dependable deciduous shrub that produces small white to reddish flowers in late May, although it is primarily planted for its bright red berries in late summer.

For interesting evergreen color look to hinoki false cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera* "Golden Mop" or "Aurea Nana") or American arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* "Rhinegold").

Perennials

Next I turn to perennials that bloom from year to year. I have narrowed my choices considerably in light of our recent water shortage. I try to focus on drought-tolerant perennials, which still gives me plenty of choice. My favorite purple perennials include Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) and lavender (*Lavandula*), which both have the added benefit of aromatic foliage.

My top choices for yellow are coreopsis moonbeam (*Coreopsis verticillata* "moonbeam") for a lemon-yellow color, or coreopsis baby sun (*C. grandiflora* "Baby Sun"), that has daisy-like yellow flowers with brown-eyed centers. Lenten

rose (*Helleborus orientalis*)—see above—boasts hardy, early-blooming flowers (late winter/early spring) in a range of pinks, deep purples, cream and white.

You can also refer to perennial books or the recommended plant hand-outs found in the Green Spring Gardens Park library. For even more ideas, plan to attend the March 16, 2003 Winter Lecture Series, from 2 to 3 pm. at Green Spring, where five horticulturists will talk about their top 10 favorite plants.

Annuals

Until recently, I never gave annuals much thought, since they only live for one year. But I have since discovered their seasonal longevity and usefulness with filling in gaps before my perennials mature. Some fun ones include dianthus (*Dianthus chinensis*), a standout no matter which color you choose—the pink, red, lilac, and white with contrasting eye are all cheerful.

Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*)—see below—feature clusters of small flowers that surprisingly put out a lot of color; I like the pink and red colors. Coleus (*Solanostemon*) is popular for its colorful foliage and prefers partial to full shade. Salvias (*Salvias*) come in an unbelievable amount of varieties and colors, and each variety looks different from the next. As an added bonus, they also attract beneficial insects to your garden.

Dig In!

So on those cold and dreary winter days, I try to focus on planning my spring garden and not on the wind chill. I look forward to seeing the bulbs bursting out of the ground and the buds popping open on warm spring mornings. Before I know it, I'll be able to start digging in my garden again. 🌱



Candlelight Tours and Sully's Christmas Past



Sully Historic Site celebrates the holiday season with candlelight tours on Friday and Saturday, December 13 and 14. Stroll the candlelit path to the elegant 1794 home of Richard and Elizabeth Collins Lee and discover the many ways the holidays were celebrated through Sully's 200-year history.

The buildings, decorated with natural greens, will glow with the splendor of real candlelight. Seasonal music will echo throughout the halls and grounds during the evening. Outside, Confederate reenactors in Sully's Civil War camp reenactment show visitors about Christmas in the field with musket firing and the opening of a Christmas box from home. In the main house, you'll encounter costumed characters from the gentry class of the Federal period (1790-1820) enjoying holiday revels. In the exhibit room, relive the 1885 holiday memories of a young visitor to Sully seeing the tree decorated with pop-guns, dolls, candles and popcorn.

Outside, warm yourself by the bonfire and join in caroling. Meet Sully's Victorian Santa and receive a special treat. Discover the sensational smells coming from the 18th century kitchen and enjoy refreshments. Learn about the holiday activities of Sully's enslaved African American community and gather by the fire to hear about life at the quarter.

Tours begin at 4:30 pm with the last tour at 7:15 pm. Prepaid reservations are required and refunds require two-week written notice. The cost is \$7 for adults and \$5 for seniors and children.

Continuing in the festive spirit, Sully hosts holiday concerts later in the month. On Friday, December 27, Ship's Company Chanteymen return to Sully with their hearty work songs of the sea, soulful ballads and a recitation of "A Visit from Whitebeard."

On Monday, December 30, IONA presents Celtic music including bagpipes and Scottish dancing. Performances are at 2 and 3 pm. There is limited seating and prepaid reservations are required. Tickets are \$6 per seat.

A guided house tour is included and refreshments will be served in the 18th century kitchen.

For information or reservations to celebrate your holidays at Sully, please call 703-437-1794. 🍷

ORIENTEERING—YOUR WAY!

On Saturday, February 22, you have several options to try some orienteering, depending on your level of experience. Families with children 10 years and older can visit **Ellanor C. Lawrence Park**, Walney, from 10 am to noon for a beginners' program. Following a short lesson on basic orienteering skills, you can find your way through the woods with park-provided maps and compasses. Reservations are required and the



cost is \$3 per person. Call 703-631-0013.

For those with more experience, ages 12 and over, come visit **Riverbend Nature Center**, from 9 am to noon. Review map and compass skills during the first hour, then hit the two-mile trail. This is only for those comfortable with orienteering. Wear boots and warm clothes. Call 703-759-9018 for reservations. The cost is \$2 and the program will be canceled in case of rain. 🍷

Ice Making in 19th Century Fairfax

By Charles Smith, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park Assistant Manager

"...Since the snow storm of Saturday, we have had sufficient cold weather to make very respectable Ice, & James has been busily engaged yesterday & to day in filling the ice house. It is the more pleasant to see the carts go by laden with this (in warm weather) acceptable & necessary commodity, as we were beginning to despair of having any this winter...."

Emmeline Machen (at Walney) to L.H. Machen, February 17, 1858

Long before electric refrigeration became reliable and affordable in the 1930s, generations relied on "natural ice." Storing ice cut from ponds, lakes and rivers has been a major winter undertaking since at least the Roman times. In the 1600s the governor of Virginia received a monopoly on the commercial harvesting of ice within the colony. Ice houses were common in many parts of North America, from the mid-Atlantic region north.

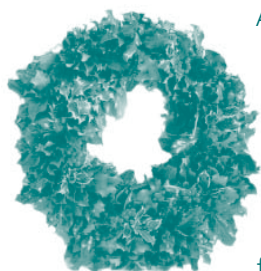
As we learn from Emmeline Machen's letter the harvesting of natural ice was an important activity on farms in 19th century Fairfax. For the average farmer, ice harvested from his own pond allowed a family to keep dairy products from spoiling on the way to local markets, preserve food in ice boxes that were commonplace in kitchens by the mid-1800s and make ice cream and chill drinks.

Ice harvesting in Virginia would begin as soon as ice was eight to twelve inches thick (six inches in a bad year). Although commercial harvesters used specialized tools, farmers relied on simple axes, large-toothed saws, hand ice plows and ice tongs.

At Machen's Walney (Ellanor C. Lawrence Park), ice was cut from farm ponds and hauled by wagon or sled to the ice house behind the family's dwelling. Blocks of 40 pounds or more were then carefully stacked and straw packed around them for insulation. If the ice house was properly built and the straw well packed, the Machens could have expected their ice harvest to last through the summer and into the next fall. They would have come to the ice house daily to break off a block of ice for use at the farm house.

Join us this winter on Saturday, January 18, 2003, from 1 to 2:30 pm at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Walney. Interpreters will demonstrate ice harvesting techniques, weather permitting, and show how these big blocks of ice, packed in straw, were stored. Visitors will get a chance to help turn the hand-cranked ice-cream maker and taste the wonderful results! Call the park at 703-631-0013 to make reservations of \$1 per person. ❧

Holiday Workshops at Green Spring



A gardener's dream, this Saturday, December 7, celebration is a full day of holiday fun at Green Spring Gardens Park. It includes live holiday music, decoration demonstrations, displays of work by local garden clubs, gifts just right for gardeners and an exhibition of birdhouses created by students of Columbia Elementary School. Come and enjoy from 9 am to 4:30 pm and get in the spirit!

In addition to these treats, the festive day includes workshops and family programs to match the season. Using freshly cut evergreens, instructors will demonstrate how to create three different projects. Please bring your own pruning shears, wire cutters and lunch. The workshops are

❧ **Holiday Wreath-Making** from 9:30 to 11 am, \$35 per participant, with the cost covering all the interesting materials;

❧ **Boxwood Tree Topiary** from 11 am to 12:30 pm, creating a miniature holiday tree with boxwood and berries, \$30 per participant;

❧ **Centerpieces for the Holidays** from 12:30 to 2 pm, for dressing up your dinner table for the celebrations, using long-lasting plant materials, \$30 per participant.

To register for a workshop, call 703-642-5173. ❧



In a Winter Wonderland

Adults are invited to join naturalists for a Saturday morning walk through Scott's Run Nature Preserve on February 8, from 9 to 11 am. Search for woodland evergreens such as mountain laurel, hemlock, ferns, ground pine and partridgeberry vine. The program is free but reservations are required. Call Riverbend Park at 703-759-9018. Canceled in case of rain. ❧

Conservation Takes Partnerships

By Jeannie McPherson, Outreach Manager, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust



An aerial photo of the 384 acres of forest purchased through the partnership.



Fall in the rare oak-hickory forest located off Pleasant Valley Road in Centreville

At the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT), we have seen first-hand how much can be accomplished by working with local and state governments toward a common goal. As a non-profit land trust dedicated to preserving Northern Virginia's open space, NVCT has played a key role in numerous land protection projects since its inception in 1994.

During that time, NVCT has enjoyed a very productive public/private partnership with Fairfax County that has resulted in the protection of almost 500 acres of land. It has also partnered with the county on numerous stewardship projects on parkland and properties in the county that have conservation easements.

Recently NVCT donated property adjacent to county parkland on Backlick Run to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA). Our group has also worked with the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to strengthen the county's conservation easement policy language to encourage the donation of easements.

One of the most successful results of this partnership to date is the preservation of a 384-acre globally rare basic oak-hickory forest in western Fairfax. In October 1999 the county's DPZ requested the Division of Natural Heritage of Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to conduct a study of an area near Centreville. Natural Heritage biologists working there identified the largest stand of basic oak-hickory forest remaining in Fairfax County, one of the largest intact stands in the entire state.

This kind of forest is characterized by a plant species mix that grows in alkaline or diabase soils that have a high pH level created by the presence of volcanic rock. Such soil is unusual in our region where the soil is generally acidic with a lower pH. These soil conditions allow plants, such as hickories that grow well in less acidic soils that have a higher pH, to dominate the landscape.


This kind of basic oak-hickory forest community exists only in certain temperate climates in the world and the mid-Atlantic region is one of them. But even here it has represented only a small percentage of our forestland. And over time these lands have been used increasingly for pasturelands or development. So this remaining stand is a rare remnant.

In an effort to protect the forest from imminent development, NVCT won a grant from the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) toward the purchase of the forest in January 2001. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors quickly provided the additional funds needed to save the area, in effect doubling the available funds.

Currently, the Fairfax County Park Authority owns the land, which is adjacent to 830 acres of existing parkland, and NVCT and the Virginia DCR will soon acquire easements to protect approximately 200 acres of the most environmentally sensitive areas of the property. The land will be called The Elklick Woodlands Natural Area Preserve.

"These acquisitions along the Pleasant Valley Road will put the finishing touches on a new park exceeding 1,500 acres in one of the fastest-growing parts of the county," said Greg Evans of the VLCF Board of Trustees. "For me, it marks the successful end of a long road. Obtaining more open space was a priority for me as a former Park Authority Board Chair. I was very happy to be able to support NVCT's grant request."

"This project is another major step in the preservation of Virginia's rich natural heritage and a great example of what can be accomplished through private-local-state partnerships," said David Brickley, former director of DCR.

NVCT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust dedicated to the preservation of natural and historic resources in Northern Virginia. NVCT has protected almost 1,000 acres, with projects in Fairfax, Arlington, Stafford, Loudoun and Prince William counties, and the City of Alexandria. For more information about NVCT events or conservation easements, visit www.nvct.org or call 703-354-5093. 

Blacksmithing in Fairfax County

By Jeanne Nicolls, Collections Manager

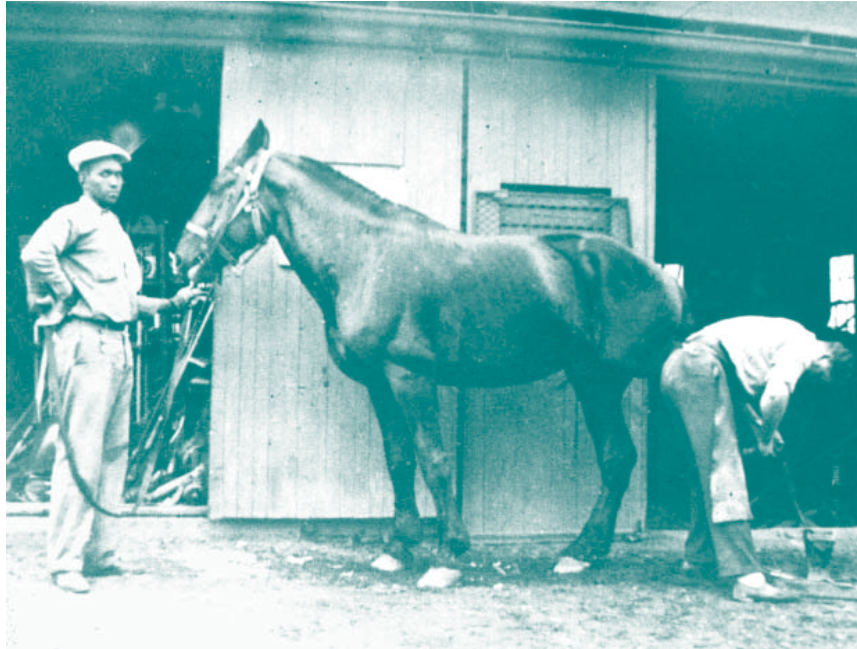
Tang! Tang! Tang! The sound of the blacksmith working at his forge once rang out across the Fairfax County countryside. From the earliest days of the colonial period until well into the 20th century, blacksmiths were important members of Fairfax County communities. Each large plantation, neighborhood and small town probably had at least one blacksmith, just as many localities today each has a hardware store and auto repair shop.

In the late 18th century enslaved blacksmiths Sam and George worked at Sully in western Fairfax County. From New York in 1789, Richard Bland Lee, owner of Sully, inquired as to the probable success of establishing a shop, asking "Am I likely to make anything of the Blacksmith's shop?" About the same time, blacksmiths Nat and George, also enslaved, were working at George Washington's Mount Vernon. Recent archaeological excavations there have unearthed evidence of their brick forge and shop.

Other records about blacksmithing are numerous. In 1814 near Colvin Run Mill, Rezin Offutt willed a tract of land "where my blacksmith's shop stood" to his children and "what blacksmith tools is on the plantation" to his wife Mary. Years later John W. Tracey, who also lived close to Colvin Run Mill, called himself a "Coach and Wagonmaker" on the 1884 Fairfax County census; by 1906, however, he was listed as a "Blacksmith, wheelwright, and farmer."

The skills required of the blacksmith were many. He crafted and repaired farm implements, domestic tools and firearms for himself and for the local community. As a wheelwright, he made and repaired wagon and carriage axles and wheels. As a farrier, he fashioned and fitted horseshoes.

Henry Moffett (1898-1984) was a fifth-generation blacksmith. The first shop his family owned was located in Leesburg. In 1904 Henry's father purchased a lot in Herndon and built a new shop. That blacksmith shop burned in the Herndon fire of 1917. Attesting to the importance of smiths to communities they served, the shop



Henry Moffett Shoeing a Horse held by Pete Dean, from the W. Berkely Green Collection

was the first building in town to be rebuilt and the first one to be wired for electricity.

Henry Moffett was the last owner of the shop. He served the needs of his rural community during a period of changing technology, from a time of horse-drawn wagons to automobiles and from hand-operated machines and tools to devices powered by electricity. Besides repairing wagon tongues, mending plows and shoeing horses, Moffett sold coal, wood and stove equipment.

By 1955 there were not enough horses left to shoe, wagons to repair or ironwork to be done to keep him in business. He closed the shop at the age of 68.

In 1975 the entire building was moved piece by piece and reassembled at Frying Pan Park. It became a permanent part of the county's heritage, thus preserving that last known original blacksmith building left in Fairfax County.

Today citizens and visitors can visit this once-common element of the Fairfax County rural and town landscape. The art and skill of the blacksmith have not been lost, however, still present in horse-shoe making and other iron work and in traditional American folk art and contemporary architectural forms.

The Moffett Blacksmith Shop is open for demonstrations during selected special events. By next spring visitors will be able to view the interior of the shop during regular visits to the park. Moffett's collection of tools used in blacksmithing is fascinating in and of itself and will be part of the interpretation of the blacksmith's work and life. Call Frying Pan Farm Park at 703-437-8261 for further information. 🌿

Note: You can help us with our historic research — please tell about other blacksmiths who worked in Fairfax County in the past. Please contact the Historic Collections Office at 703-631-1429.

Planning for the Future: *the Green Infrastructure Initiative*

As Fairfax County continues to become more urban, the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) is finding one of its core missions increasingly difficult to fulfill. What was rural land in the county as little as 10 years ago has now been developed as residential or business and shopping areas. Land that supported wildlife, green spaces and cultural resources is shrinking rapidly.

“How do you decide what resources to protect? Who decides? Under what rules?”

The FCPA is tasked by the county government with protecting those resources. But with so much going on and because of the limits in the Authority’s manpower and budget, what takes precedence? Conserving open space or protecting archaeological sites? Preserving wetlands or restoring historic sites? Are independent forest stands more important than land close to existing parks? And who decides? Under what rules?

Following a new initiative being used elsewhere, the FCPA has adapted the concept of “Green Infrastructure” modeling to help focus the county’s conservation and environmental planning efforts. It will enable the county to respond quickly and effectively to questions involving the protection of our natural and cultural resources.

The draft model allows us to look at how we can integrate preservation of our natural and cultural resource values together with where they exist geographically and topographically across the county. The idea is to

create a unified approach for preserving the community’s underlying environmental and cultural foundation.

One necessary element for the modeling was excellent mapping devices. The county’s Geographic Information System (GIS) is an electronic mapping system that includes layers of information about the land and structures within the county. These transparent layers can be put together in many combinations to compare one kind of information with information in other layers in the same location. For the Green Infrastructure modeling, the missing part was identifying the values—decisions about what matters most—that needed to be considered.

Over the last 18 months, staff in the Planning and Development Division of the FCPA worked with many different county agencies and other FCPA staff to analyze and gather a wealth of data and to identify values that are critical to making conservation and preservation decisions. They organized that data into three broad categories: environmental, cultural and open space/proximal (what’s close to existing protected resources).

“The project...has given the Park Authority a strong tool for planning our county’s future.”

The environmental features considered included hydrology, tree cover and wetlands, among others. Upland forest was considered an increasingly valuable habitat because of the major losses of such forests to other uses.

The cultural features evaluated were historic and prehistoric architectural sites,


county historical districts and historic sites. In the last category, proximity to existing parkland, other public lands and open space were also factored into the analysis.

Next, FCPA created an analysis of the importance of each individual feature type. Again working with consulting agencies and an informal project team, staff assigned a numerical value or weight to each individual feature that matched its perceived importance.

Finally they put these weighted values over a layered GIS county map that included topographical, cultural, existing parkland and undeveloped land in the county. Together the group was able to establish the relative importance of each 25-square-foot area of land based on the resources located there.

The most obvious product of the project will be the Green Infrastructure Map showing areas where there are the greatest combinations of high-priority natural and cultural resources that are not currently managed as parkland. Generally those areas are found in stream valleys or contiguous upland forests where important cultural resources are also located.

For the FCPA the Green Infrastructure model will first be used to help target areas for resource management, preservation and/or parkland acquisition. This tool has short- and long-term planning applications and can be used for site-specific work and broader community and regional study.

The model is one that can be used by many agencies to help develop a similar approach to preservation and management efforts. Certainly it makes visually clear much of what has been difficult to follow in policy circles. The hope is that a shared vision for protection for the county’s resources will emerge. This major Green Infrastructure project has given the FCPA a strong tool for planning our county’s future. 

HISTORIC SITES

► **Dranesville Tavern** *continued from page 1*

as “one of the best roadside inns in the state of Virginia.”

When the Park Authority became the site’s owner, it reopened Dranesville Tavern in 1978 as a historic site. Soon after a number of people returned to the inn to offer their own stories of earlier visits. They told of having meals and staying overnight at Dranesville Tavern in the years before Leesburg Pike became a hard-surfaced road and electricity reached as far into the country as the Dranesville area of Fairfax County.

One delightful elderly woman, Margaret Ailes Wilmer, remembered a visit she made to the tavern when she was 10 years old. She was being treated to a trip from Harper’s Ferry to Washington with her father. They were going by horse and buggy. It was winter—December 10, either 1909 or 1910, and very cold. They had started in Harper’s Ferry with hot bricks to warm them. At Leesburg Mrs. Wilmer’s father went into a drug store and bought a newspaper, half of which to stuff in back of her coat and half in front to keep her warm.

They reached Dranesville Tavern after dark, halfway to their destination. Upstairs, their bedroom was on the east end of the tavern, above the closed parlor and away from the heat of the kitchen and the parlor fire. Sixty years later she *still* remembered the cold.

When father and daughter awoke in the morning, the water in the washbasin pitcher had an ice coating that her father broke for her to wash her face. Breakfast she recalled with glee. As the only guests, they ate with the family in the dining room at a long table

where she ate a “huge” stack of pancakes with syrup before climbing back into the buggy.

Today the trip from Leesburg to Georgetown is a brief one, on a road crowded with residential communities and shopping destinations. The Dranesville Tavern is just a spot along the way, a landmark that has many stories to tell of other times. It reminds us of what a difference a few decades can make in the journeys we take. 🌿

This article was taken from research by Barbara Naef, the former Resource Stewardship Manager in the Authority’s Resource Management Division, and now an invaluable volunteer working with the FCPA’s Historic Collections. She worked to develop the early interpretative tours and events at the Tavern.



Dranesville Hotel (Old Jackson Tavern), from “The Rambler,” “Washington Star, July 28, 1918.

► **Bald Eagles** *continued from page 1*

In the air, the bald eagle reigns supreme. While circling several hundred feet above water, a bald eagle can spot a small fish below the surface, sweep into a graceful descent and snatch it with its talons in a routine show of predatory power. Its eyesight is so sharp (at least four times more acute than a person with perfect vision) that it can identify prey as small as a rabbit from well over a mile away.

While migrating, the eagle can average 30 miles per hour, effortlessly gliding along on columns of air called thermals with occasional slow ponderous beats of its majestic wings. While courting, bald eagles perform breathtaking aerial displays including rapid dives and turns. Sometimes, where two bald eagles grasp talons in mid-air, they plummet in spiraling cartwheels to within a few feet of the ground before releasing talons. These aerodynamic marvels are relatively light and hollow-boned, the males averaging about nine pounds, females a few pounds heavier. Each skeleton weighs about



a half-pound, its 7,000 feathers one pound.

Bald eagles often mate for life, and care for their newborn eaglets, which have a low survival rate. In the nest, adult eagles clench their powerful talons into harmless balls to spare chicks and coax them to take shreds of meat from their beaks. If fledglings survive, they will live to an average of 15 to 20 years, although some have been recorded living close to 30 years in the wild.

Bald eagles prefer to nest in trees with large canopies and high perches near water, where they can survey and prey for fish, a staple, but they will also eat waterfowl, mammals and turtles, both live and as carrion. Eagles are notorious for stealing

catches from ospreys and for hijacking carcasses and injured prey of such fellow scavengers as vultures, ravens and crows.

Usually eagles winter in this area from October through March; however, nesting pairs may stay through summer. Some popular spots for viewing bald eagles locally are Mason Neck State Park, the Accotink Wildlife Refuge on Fort Belvoir, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Riverbend Park on the Potomac and Huntley Meadows. The last two are Fairfax County Park Authority parks.

A good chance to see bald eagles will be on Saturday, January 11, when naturalists from Hidden Oaks Nature Center lead a free tour from 9 am to noon at Mason Neck State Park in search of eagles. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one and dress for the weather. Meet at Pohick Bay Regional Park Marina and caravan to Mason Neck State Park (pay fee at gate). If there are hazardous road conditions, the trip is cancelled, with a snow date of January 18. Call Hidden Oaks at 703-941-1065 by January 8 to make your reservation. 🌿

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YOUR PARKS

*Here are some of the parks
where winter becomes a wonderland*

Burke Lake Park
7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station
Call 703-323-6600

Colvin Run Mill
10017 Colvin Run Road
Great Falls
Call 703-759-2771

Ellenor C. Lawrence Park
5040 Walney Road, Chantilly
Call 703-631-0013

Frying Pan Park
2709 West Ox Road, Herndon
Call 703-437-9101

Green Spring Gardens Park
4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria
Call 703-642-5173

Hidden Oaks Nature Center
7701 Royce Street, Annandale
Call 703-941-1065

Hidden Pond Nature Center
8511 Greeley Blvd., Springfield
Call 703-451-9588

Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria
Call 703-768-2525

Lake Accotink Park
7500 Accotink Park Rd., Springfield
Call 703-569-3464

Lake Fairfax Park
1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston
Call 703-471-5414

Riverbend Park
8700 Potomac Hills Street
Great Falls
Call 703-759-9018

Sully Historic Site
Sully Road, Chantilly
Call 703-437-1794

Need directions? More information?
Visit us online at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks

Winter Wonders



Family Wreath Making

Enjoy a creative holiday time on Sunday, December 15, from 2 to 3:30 pm at Hidden Pond Nature Center. Instructor Clara Ailes will inspire you and your family to create two seasonal wreaths of straw and vines, decorated with greens, cones, dried flowers and ribbons. Call 703-451-9588 for reservations to this memorable program. The cost is \$15 per family for supplies.



Birding for Beginners

Winter is a great time to begin birding. On Saturday, January 25 from 8 to 10:30 am, visitors aged 16 and over will meet at Huntley Meadows Visitor Center to get a good look at the avian stars of the air. First, we'll discuss various aspects of different field guides and optics. Then we'll walk to look for resident birds. Call Huntley at 703-768-2525 to make reservations for this free program. Canceled in case of rain.



Maple Syrup Boil-Down

Celebrate the coming of spring with a maple syrup boil-down at Colvin Run Mill! On two Sundays in February, the 9th and the 16th, from noon to 2 pm, bring the family to experience this traditional experience. Watch as the sap is collected from the maple trees on the site. Afterwards it is reduced over an open fire down to delicious maple syrup! The program is free; call Colvin Run Mill at 703-759-2771 for directions.



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